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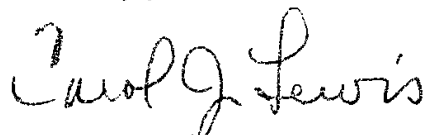
F. Andrew Turley  
Supervisory Attorney  
Central Enforcement Docket  
Federal Election Commission  
999 E Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20463

RE: MUR 4646

Dear Mr. Turley:

Would you please advise us of the status of our complaint, either by call, fax or note? On reading the attached article, we fear we may be just another statistic at this point.

Sincerely yours,



Carol J. Lewis

cc: Jack Scarola, Esq.

enclosure

# Elections oversight agency buried by new cases, backlog of data

The Palm Beach Post

WASHINGTON — Life these days at the Federal Election Commission — the orphaned oversight agency of big money politics — summons images of Lucy Ricardo on the chocolate-factory assembly line, desperately trying to keep up as the candy rolls by on the conveyor belt.

There are fresh reams of financial data that have been collected by candidates already running for the 1998 congressional cycle; so, too, was the enormous backlog not just from the 1996 elections, but from lingering 1994 cases.

"It's hard to keep up with the assembly line," conceded Lawrence Noble, the election commission's general counsel, trying to come to terms with still another ratcheting up of his slapstick work world.

He is ruing the fact that, despite all the months of furious focus on campaign finance abuses by the incumbent politicians over in the Capitol, it turns

out that, by his reckoning, the main change next year at the commission will be even more triage.

In its closing rush, Congress, after hearing into such complex campaign problems as money laundering, hidden foreign donations and the political wander currency known as "soft money," rejected a budget request to add 27 enforcement specialists to the FEC.

The commission now has 52 investigators trying to track the often ingenious, sometimes scandalous ways of capitalization that politicians are constantly repeating or reimpacting.

In the coming congressional and presidential cycles, commission investigators expect an even bigger boom in the soft-money universe of unlimited, unregulated "party" contributions that, routed roundabout to candidates, came to dominate this year's scandal inquiries.

"The net result is that cases that should be handled are going to be dismissed," Noble said of

the personnel shortage at the FEC, where the triage practice has meant that 217 of 319 promising cases have already been put aside, inactive and likely to stay that way. "And cases we are handling will take much longer than they should and will be investigated less thoroughly," he said.

This is the state of hard facts and soft money at an agency that, as Noble describes it, is rooted in "the oddity that we are regulating those who control our budget."

The \$5 million in rejected financing for enforcement would have been a mere lag in the larger world of Capitol pork. But Congress did manage some extra money — for more computers and for an outside audit of an agency already widely criticized as having been custom-tooled for inaction by the major parties' lords and lawyers.

"I have yet to see a computer that can take a deposition, write an interrogatory, interview a witness," Noble said. He is rankled that Congress

made it "very clear" that there will be no additional enforcement workers at the FEC, whatever the drumbeat may otherwise be on the Hill for a number of independent counsel and grand jury inquiries into the 1996 elections.

The hobbled commission gets little respect from any quarter in the campaign reform debate.

"Even if you added 52 more people, I don't think you'd have any more product coming out of the FEC," said Kent Cooper, a former commission executive who is now director of the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan watchdog group.

"There's a very narrow funnel at the end of the tolling all these cases," he noted, describing the perennial standoffs on taking major actions, which are produced by a six-member commission designated for a 3-3 split between party appointees.

Beyond that, the level of expertise needed to unravel political conspiracies involving soft money is racing beyond the FEC, in Cooper's view. Noble insists it is there, but needs bolstering.